OLOMA‘O

(Myadestes lanaiensis rutha)

Bones found in dry coastal areas are silent testimony to the much wider range that the Oloma‘o, or Moloka‘i Thrush, once occupied. Now restricted to wet ‘ohi‘a forests above 4,000 feet elevation, this rare bird is in extreme danger of extinction. Its population is estimated to be fewer than 20 birds.

DISTRIBUTION: Oloma‘o are found above 4,000 feet, between Kamakou Peak and Pepe‘opae Bog, and on Oloku‘i Plateau.

DESCRIPTION: The Oloma‘o is 7-8 inches in length and is dark olive-brown above with a gray throat and breast. Sexes are similar. Juveniles are spotted brown and buff.

VOICE: Oloma‘o have a quiet, melodious song that is emitted while in flight or from a perch in native vegetation.

NESTING: Breeding biology is unknown. Observations of the nesting habits of the ‘Oma‘o, or Hawai‘i Thrush, have revealed that nests of twigs, fern fronds, mosses, and leaves are often placed in hollows of ‘ohi‘a trees.

DIET: Fruits, berries, seeds, and insects of native ‘ohi’a forests make up the diet of the Oloma‘o.

An Oloma‘o snatches fruit from an ‘olapa tree.
—Painting by Sheryl Ives Boynton

CONSERVATION NOTE: Historically, the Oloma‘o was common on Moloka‘i and Lana‘i. The destruction of dry and mesic lowland forests eliminated much of its former habitat Today the Oloma‘o dwells in ‘ohi‘a forests with a dense understory of ‘olapa, tree ferns, mosses, and shrubs. Introduced plants, such as Koster’s curse, strawberry guava, and white ginger, compete with understory plants and threaten essential habitat of the Oloma‘o.

Grazing mammals pose an additional threat that must be countered if the Oloma‘o and other endangered forest birds are to survive. Cattle and goats began to disrupt native forests soon after Captain Cooks arrival in the islands. The grazing activities of these animals opened the forests, making way for axis deer released on Moloka‘i in 1868. The original herd of eight deer rapidly expanded in size, and by 1898, 6,000-7,000 deer were having a devastating impact on the native forests of east Moloka‘i.

The recovery plan for the Oloma‘o calls for the control of goats, pigs, and axis deer. Hunting is encouraged to reduce numbers of feral mammals and prevent their expansion into essential habitat. The vulnerability of native forests to the ravages of browsing mammals and other introduced plants and animals makes management a challenging, yet essential task if native forest birds like the Oloma‘o are to be saved from extinction.

Prepared by State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife

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